

**CONFIRMATION SPEECH
BY
DIRECTOR WALTER ALLEN III
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On December 9, 2003, I was honored when Governor Schwarzenegger appointed me as Director of the California Youth Authority and it is also an honor to come before you for confirmation today. Since the time of my appointment, I have worked toward the implementation of my vision for the department. That vision is simple: return the department to its former status as a national model for the effective treatment of delinquent and troubled youth in a therapeutic environment.

As you can imagine, the necessary changes will take us down a difficult course. The Youth Authority inherited by the new administration is poorly equipped to face the numerous challenges presented by the wards we currently receive. With the imposition of the sliding scale in the mid-nineties and the subsequent increase in the number of county detention facilities, our population now primarily consists of some of this state's most violent and disturbed youth, who are often plagued with serious mental illness issues and entrenched gang behavior. In addition, our existing facilities are outdated, our programs fall short of national standards, our reputation is tainted, and we have limited resources.

Given these facts, the transformation of the Youth Authority will be a challenging path. Fortunately, the department has already started down the road to recovery. As you may know, the department is currently working with the Prison Law Office to finalize the settlement agreement for *Farrell v. Allen*, a taxpayer lawsuit, which pointed out many of the deficiencies inherent in our department.

While the settlement is not quite complete, we expect that in the near future the details will be finalized and implementation of the remedial plans will move forward. In the mean time, I have enacted a number of reforms that I felt were necessary now, not later. For example, the Secured

Programming Areas, better known as “SPA’s” or “cages”, were removed at my direction. In a joint memorandum with Secretary Hickman, I ordered that the “code of silence” would no longer be tolerated. I hired outside consultants to develop a new use of force policy and we have just completed training for our staff statewide. In addition, the archaic Tamarack Lodge at the Preston Youth Correctional Facility, has been closed, critical changes to the management and leadership of CYA have been made, I have opened the doors to community organizations, and I recently established a new ward-family council program at the institutions which will give parents and guardians a voice in the department and keep them up-to-date on issues occurring within our facilities.

Although we have made some progress over the past six months, it is important to remember that many of the critical reforms that we need to put into place will be long-term projects. For example, one of my top priorities, which the recently released Independent Review Panel also supported, is the reduction of the current size of our living units to the national standard of twenty-five wards. In California, many of our current living units house fifty to seventy-five wards, making adequate programming and treatment virtually impossible. Last week, I elected to visit several juvenile correctional programs in Missouri and Texas, both of these states limit the number of wards in a living unit to twenty-five or less, and I can assure you that smaller living units make a huge difference in rehabilitation and treatment. Another thing that I observed in each of the states was the availability of treatment and recreational time. Wards simply spend more time out of their rooms recreating and receiving treatment services. While we are currently working toward these changes, this type of comprehensive reform cannot be made overnight. It will require modifications to resource allocation, culture, and practices that have been carried out for decades in the CYA.

There is no question in anyone’s mind that reform is urgently needed, but we must move forward in a direct, measured and methodical manner with evidence-based solutions to the complex

problems that we are facing. I can assure you that I am doing everything possible to expedite the changes but I will need help from the administration, the Legislature and the community.

I am confident that working together we can transform the department into something much better than what exists today. Ladies and Gentlemen, and esteemed members of the committee, my son is here in the audience today sitting right behind me and I am truly blessed because to this day he has been a model citizen and growing up he was a wonderful child. However, I want to tell you that if he had made the wrong choices or been involved with the wrong people and was committed to the Youth Authority, I would want to know that he was safe, that he received services that would help him, and that he would return to our home and our community as a productive young man. We owe that much to every parent in California but before this can happen we have to develop a community within the CYA where youth are effectively rehabilitated instead of simply incarcerated.

I am not going to make any excuses for the deficiencies of the department. They exist, we have identified them, and we are working to address them. I have been told that in the past, many promises were made by the department and these promises were not kept for one reason or another. As a result, the CYA was known as a department that did not follow through on its commitments and had a less than stellar reputation. It is my goal as the new director to provide clear expectations of what needs to be accomplished and to hold the department accountable for those things that it is tasked with completing.

In recent months the Youth Authority has received some tough criticisms and negative press regarding its operations and I can tell you that honestly, most of it was warranted. However, for the record, with the exception of a few bad actors and some management issues, the Youth Authority has very dedicated, hard working employees that want the department and the youth we treat to succeed. Every day they work hard dealing with some of the most difficult youth in the state and many have told me personally that they are very pleased with the fact that we are

returning to the therapeutic mission and that they are committed to making the necessary reforms that will bring the CYA into the 21st century as a therapeutic environment for our most troubled youth.

Before I close, I would just like to take a moment to recognize my family, my mother and father, my wife and son, and my aunt, and thank them for being here with me today. Without their love and support I would not be sitting in this chair.

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions that you may have.

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